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FROM : Amembassy Guatemala DATE: December 14, 1977

SUBJECT : Monthly Report on Political Violence and Human Rights: October 1977

REF :

SUMMARY: By the measure of press-reported incidents, October was an average month for political violence in Guatemala. Twenty-three incidents accounted for nineteen deaths. The EGP mounted several spectaculars; the PGT/FAR, more active than the EGP in recent months, apparently marked time. On the right, ESA and GAIGAS provided headlines but no persuasive evidence of flesh-and-blood existence. The human rights campaign continued to attract attention, as well as criticism from left and right. END SUMMARY

The EGP continued to demonstrate ability to strike with relative impunity by mounting minor spectaculars in different parts of the country. The most dramatic was the sidetracking, in a Guatemala City suburb, of a passenger train carrying holiday-bound workers to the Pacific port of San José. The EGP unfurled propaganda banners, passed out flyers and lectured the passengers on the Sandinista cause in Nicaragua while denouncing the "electoral farce" in progress in Guatemala.

Faking a motorcycle accident, elements who purportedly identified themselves as EGP also detained a police van on the Inter-American Highway near Cuilapa, Santa Rosa Department. Ambushers removed three accused murderers (none known to us) from the van and the weapons of the five police guards. They reportedly told the guards they would not be harmed because they "form part of the people for whom we fight." That the EGP rather than common criminals were responsible for the exploit has yet to be confirmed.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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The month also saw the murder of yet another comisionado militar in Olopa, Chiquimula Department; and the abduction of a comisionado and an assistant mayor in nearby Jocotán. The actions bore the earmarks of the EGP. Although the organization has been active in the Honduran border area, it has yet to take credit for the current set of incidents.

As in previous months, while most of the fatalities appeared circumstantially to be victims of right-wing terrorism, origin of the acts proved difficult to document. Among the "probables:" The abduction and subsequent torture-murder of three members of a Chimaltenango agricultural cooperative; and, in Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez, the gunning-down of a community leader during a meeting of the local betterment committee. Khaki-clad interlopers reportedly shouted: "Eliminate the Communis... d guerrillas."

Meanwhile, two phantom groups on the right inspired publicity but gave no further evidence of real existence. A communique of the so-called Anti-Communist Secret Army (ESA) denied threats to prominent leftists at San Carlos University and responsibility for the June killing of labor lawyer Mario López Larrave, but vowed to avenge the assassination, also still unsolved, of former Defense Minister Rafael ARRIAGA Bosque. At the same time labor leader Miguel Angel ALBIZUREZ (CNT) told the press he had received two death threats from ESA.

The anti-Salvadoran entity known ... the initials GALGAS stimulated the fruitless search of Lake Amatitlán for the thirty Salvadoran bodies GALGAS alleged to have dumped there over the past year. A GALGAS press release also took credit for 120 other victims and claimed a membership of 700. The episode fueled skepticism about GALGAS' bonafides.

Human Rights Atmospherics. On a more philosophical plane, human rights continued to stimulate interest and debate. The Nobel Prize to Amnesty International prompted editorial praise from the dailies El Impacto and El Gráfico and at least as vigorous a denunciation from staid El Imparcial. AI's "propaganda" in the latter's words, had encouraged violence and subversion, not peace.

San Carlos University was the scene of the "First Central American Seminar on Human Rights," organized by the (San Carlos) University Students Association (AEU). The leftist-sponsored meeting concluded

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that "basic individual guaranties are violently denied (in Guatemala) and that the dictatorial governments which have succeeded one another since 1954 (the fall of Arbenz) are responsible." The seminar provoked some criticism in the Left for its "petit bourgeois" goals. For the National Committee of Trade Union Unity (CNUS), an umbrella organization grouping most of the non-oficialista unions, the human rights drive of the Carter Administration represented a device to justify attacks on the "Socialist bloc." CNUS concluded that human rights, enshrined in a rule of law of bourgeois origin, have no relevance for the Guatemalan working class until the capitalist system crumbles. CNUS' advice: Forget about human rights abstractions and use pressure tactics to achieve concrete advances. The CNUS opinion appeared in Gente, an uninhibited weekly which, although it lends its pages to all political hues, is the most leftist of the regular media.

In the wake of the Arriaga assassination, a spokesman for the Presidency charged various unidentified groups with seeking to "set a trap" for the government. These elements hoped to provoke a state of siege the better to accuse the President of human rights violations.

Statistics. In terms of gross numbers, October was not a particularly violent month by recent Guatemalan standards. Twenty-three incidents (not counting a rash of noise bombs detonated by the PGT in Quezaltenango and Pacific lowland towns) accounted for 19 deaths. Even more dramatically than in past months, the reported incidents were concentrated in the Pacific lowlands, which accounted for 15. The Oriente recorded four; Guatemala City, three; the Indian highlands, one.

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